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The Human Potential Seminars at Kendall College, a part of the Program for Humanized Curriculum Design are described. The Seminars are based on the assumption that every student is gifted in the sense of having unique potentialities. The conviction is held that something is right with the participants; motivation focuses on individual discovery and group reinforcement of strengths, capabilities, and success factors of each individual. Three techniques used are: (1) strength bombardment, in which the individual reveals his concept of his own strengths, the group indicates further strengths seen in the person, and there is discussion regarding causes that are preventing usage of these strengths; (2) success bombardment, in which successful and unsuccessful experiences are analyzed by the group for each participant; and (3) goal-setting activities, using student values, the goals set being achievable and believable. Behavioral objectives are increases in: (1) self-motivation, (2) self-determination, and (3) affirmation of self-worth. The Seminars are considered educational, not therapeutic; participation is voluntary, and grouping is heterogeneous. Results are encouraging, though difficult to measure. (AE)

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Kendall College
Evanston, Ill.
CENTER FOR CURRICULUM DESIGN

EVERY STUDENT IS A GIFTED STUDENT

Some Dramatic Results of a Learning Experience Based on the Above Hypothesis

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The Program for Humanized Curriculum Design is devoted to the creation of educational environments, services, materials, and facilities which are learner-centered, multi-sensory, interactive, and experiential in form.

EVERY STUDENT A GIFTED STUDENT: SOME DRAMATIC RESULTS OF A LEARNING EXPERIENCE BASED ON SAID HYPOTHESIS

Every student is a gifted student. Until we educators realize this--and more important, until our students realize this--we will never adequately perform our mission. For what is the mission of the counselor and the teacher but to nurture, draw forth, and enable the student to develop towards fruition his own particular capacities? And how is this mission to be accomplished unless we know, and unless the student knows, what his particular capacities are? And where in the over-all learning process today, in the counseling office or in the classroom, do we provide the opportunity for either the educator or the educated to become thus knowledgeable?

Every student is a gifted student. This is to say that <u>every</u> student has potentialities which, though often dormant or imperfectly realized, are particularly his own. Often they are not purely intellectual capacities, and this is probably the main reason for their arrested development. Educators traditionally define a student's giftedness in terms of intellectual endowment alone. Yet our students possess many other capacities which, for proper development towards fruition, need the same deliberate cultivation as their intellect. In many cases, the full development of a student's intellectual capacity is not even possible without a complementary development of some of his other capacities.

Every student is a gifted student. What would happen if we educators related to our students on the basis of that assumption? We submit that our results would be dramatic, based upon a 12-month experience both as participants, trainees, experimenters and leaders, with an educational technique which does, in fact, proceed on this assumption. This technique (more accurately, this <u>combination</u> of techniques, known as Achievement Motivation Systems) is being developed at Kendall College under the leadership of Dr. Billy B. Sharp, a psychologist who serves as Executive Director of the W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation in Chicago, and Dr. James McHolland, Director of the Kendall College Counseling Department. At Kendall we have incorporated these techniques into what we call the Human Potential Seminars.

The Human Potential Seminars are founded on the conviction that something is right with the participants, whereas traditional group therapy starts with the proposition that something is wrong with the participants. Students can be most effectively motivated if we work from the former, positive hypothesis. Thus the achievement motivation process focuses primarily on what the student has going for him--on his personal resources--rather than on what has him hung-up. Thus the Human Potential Seminars elicit individual discovery and immediate group reinforcement of the personal strengths, resources, and success experiences of each seminar participant.

The principal techniques for achieving such discovery and reinforcement are the strength bombardment, the success bombardment, discussion of personal value systems and goal setting. In the first technique the student who volunteers to undergo the experience begins by telling the group what he sees his personal strengths to be. When he has accomplished this, he then asks the group to respond by indicating what strengths they see him as having. The group invariably responds with a further list of strengths, frequently longer than that offered by the student himself. The student then asks, "What do you see that is preventing me from using my strengths?" It is at this point that the group identifies some of the individual's weaknesses, but in the highly positive context of the experience this is perceived and accepted as highly constructive in that it calls attention to how strengths can be used more fully. Following the strength bombardment, the group members construct a group fantasy for the person involved in which they imagine what he can be doing five or more years from now if he is using his strengths. Finally, the student is asked to relate to the group how he felt while undergoing this experience.

When every volunteer for the strength bombardment experience has participated (the order being determined by the drawing of names), the success bombardment begins. The student begins by telling the group about the most successful experiences in his entire life. Following this he tells the group about three recent experiences which were unsuccessful. The group then analyzes the unsuccesses in the light of the success or achievement pattern revealed in the student's discussion of his successes. The purpose of the success bombardment is threefold: to make the student more conscious of his own personal success pattern, to indicate if his failures exhibit the non-application of his success pattern, and to suggest areas of human experience in which the person has apparently not attempted achievement--in other words, has not tapped into his own potential.

Another very important element in the achievement motivation process is the goal-setting experience, which is a weekly feature of the seminars. At the close of each session, students are asked to set individual goals to be accomplished before the next meeting. Each goal must meet six criteria: It must be conceivable--capable of being put into words; it must be believable to the person formulating it; it must be achievable; it must be measurable; it must be something the student really wants to do; and it must be presented without an alternative. Goals are not appropriate if they are self-injurious or harmful to others. The purpose of this goal-setting is to help students to realize that they can have some control over what happens in their lives. It is important to begin putting goal control in the present, immediate life of the student. Initially we are not interested in having students set long-term goals. For instance, such

a goal as the desire to be a physician is so remote from most students in their early years of college that it does not act as an effective motivating force for them. More often, however, the college student has no long-term goals for his life but has been told repeatedly he must have them to succeed in college or anywhere else. So we try to break goals down into smaller units of time in order to give the student control over setting and achieving goals and bringing order and meaning into his life.

Although goals are to be achievable and believable, the student is encouraged to set goals in areas of his experience where potential may not have been tapped. After a few weeks students are urged to set goals slightly beyond the realm of their ordinary achievement pattern. They are urged to extend themselves, and to begin setting goals in an area in which they have not been formerly able to achieve, but in which it is possible for them to do so if they use some of their newly discovered potential. The anticipated and accomplished result of all this goal setting is that students begin to realize that they have abilities to do many things that they didn't know they could do. At the same time, the student learns a very comforting fact: He can have control over much of his life.

One of the important aspects of the goal-setting process is that the instructor accepts the students' values. The instructor is not present to change the values of the students. We take their values seriously and encourage the students to test them out, achieve in those areas and determine whether these are significant values. For example, one student's highest value was maintaining his motorcycle. The most valuable thing to this student during the early weeks of the seminar was a clean and shined-up motorcycle. Hence, he set his goal in that area for the first three weeks. One might ask, "What does a clean motorcycle have to do with academic performance?" and the obvious answer is "nothing." But it had everything to do with what was important to that student. If we are sincere when we say that we want to take his value system seriously and that we want him to be able to do what he wants to do, then his values are relevant to him no matter how much they may conflict with the instructor's value system. That assures of course that the goals are not injurious of self or others. A very interesting thing happened with this particular student, whose grade point average the semester preceding the Human Potential Seminars was 1.5 (D). As he observed other persons in the group setting academic goals and achieving them, he began setting academic goals himself. He found successful models with whom to identify and his value system changed. He achieved a 3.0 grade average (B) for the semester. In brief, personal values are directly involved in personal motivation.

The achievement motivation process does not just accept a student's value system. It makes it known. At appropriate points in the Human Potential Seminar, various techniques are used to help each student become conscious of his personal value system, and to help him bring his potentials, his values, and his goals into an integral synthesis. This enables him to assume a more conscious, decisive, self-direction of his life, as manifested eventually (among other ways) in an increased ability to perceive long-range personal goals as well as short-range achievements.

In essence, the behavioral objectives of the Achievement Motivation System approach, as presently developed in the Human Potential Seminars, are threefold: increased self-motivation, increased self-determination, and increased affirmation of self-worth. Since these behavioral objectives are affective rather than cognitive in nature, their successful attainment is less easily demonstrated in measurable terms than a more traditional intellectual behavioral objective. One index of measurement which is immediately available, although improving academic achievement is not the primary purpose of the seminars, is the grade point average of the seminar participants. 69% of the students who were in these groups during the initial semester of experimentation showed an average improvement of nearly an entire grade point. Of the remaining 31%, a few went down, and many maintained roughly the same grades. Those whose grades went down were followed up through the summer school session. All of them raised their grade point averages in summer school. They were therefore interviewed individually and asked why they were academically unsuccessful during the semester in which they participated in the motivational seminars but were able to achieve higher grades in the summer. Each responded that he had been unconvinced of the "workability" of the Human Potentials experience while undergoing it. It looked too simplistic. (Incidentially, each of these persons had been exposed to rather traditional group psychotherapy prior to the seminar.) Only when each person saw that the motivational techniques worked for so many of his friends did he decide to attempt to use the experience for himself. Another index indicative of the success of the Human Potential Seminars in motivating students was their virtually perfect attendance at the weekly two-hour, non-credit seminar sessions.

Beyond these indices, the achieved results are less easy to measure. For instance, many students were completely down on themselves attitudinally when they entered the seminar. An impressive number of them became able to respond positively to themselves and to find a meaning in their lives for which they had been searching. They began doing some of the things that they had wanted to do, but which they formerly felt incapable of doing. At this time we know of no effective means of measuring such results except by reference to the statements that these students made about themselves as they experienced the achievement motivation process. Personality and psychological tests fail to "touch" the dimensions that students were becoming successful in.

There are certain essentials of the achievement motivation process that must be clearly understood:

1. We bring students together in the Human Potential Seminars to give them a small group educational experience, not group therapy. We are not there primarily to find out about their problems or their conflicts except as these compromise the utilization of resources they may have. Throughout the experience a highly structured, deliberate examination is conducted into areas of their lives that they frequently have not looked into previously.

2. Initial participation in the seminars is always on a voluntary basis.

3. The Achievement Motivation process operates on two crucial assumptions about the student participants, namely, that they are essentially mentally healthy individuals, and that they have a vast amount of potential that has been heretofore untapped.

4. The grouping in the Human Potential Seminars is always heterogeneous in as many ways as possible. Participants run the gamut from highly successful individuals (academically and/or otherwise) to gross under-achievers (ditto). The successful students serve as models for the under-achievers. Often times, the "academic" under-achiever serves as a success model for the successful academic student in areas where he has not excelled.

All who desire to be placed on a mailing list for future reports on Achievement Motivation Systems and the Human Potential Seminars, please write:

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